

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 17324

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDIP, SREF, VM, US
SUBJ: COMMENTS OF UNHCR OFFICIAL ON SITUATION IN HANOI

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF A RECENT CONVERSATION BETWEEN
A UNHCR OFFICIAL IN HANOI AND AN OFFICER IN THE JOINT CASUALTY
RESOLUTION CENTER LIAISON OFFICER IN THE EMBASY, WITH REGARD TO
THE UN OFFICIAL'S VIEW ON THE MOOD AND ATMOSPHERE IN HANOI, WHERE
HE IS CURRENTLY STATIONED. TO MAINTAIN ACCESS TO THIS PERCEPTIVE
OBSERVER, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO PROTECT HIS IDENTITY AS THE SOURCE OF
THE FOLLOWING VIEWS: END SUMMARY.

1. MR. ALESSANDRO CASELLA, UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE IN HANOI, CALLED
MY OFFICE AUG 3 TO MEET INFORMALLY BEFORE LEAVING THAT SAME DAY.
MR. CASELLA'S OBSERVATIONS ON THE SITUATION IN VIET-NAM ARE AS
FOLLOWS:

2. ECONOMIC. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN VIET-NAM NOW BORDER ON THE
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CATASTROPHIC. THE OFFICIAL RICE RATION IN SOME PARTS OF VIET-NAM
(CENTRAL VN AND NGHE TINH PROVINCE) IS FROM SIX TO EIGHT POUNDS
PER MONTH PER INDIVIDUAL. WHEN ASKED ABOUT CONDITIONS IN SAIGON,
MR. CASELLA REPLIED THAT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WERE CLOSING DOWN
THE CHINESE MIDDLEMEN WHO TRADITIONALLY BUY RICE FROM THE FARMERS
TO SELL TO CITY DWELLERS. BECAUSE THE CHINESE MERCHANTS PAY
THREE TIMES THE OFFICIAL RATE, FARMERS HAVE BEEN SELLING TO THE

CHINESE INSTEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT. WITHOUT THE CHINESE MIDDLE-MEN MR. CASELLA BELIEVES THERE WILL BE MUCH LESS IMPETUS TO GROW RICE BEYOND THE LEVELS OF PERSONAL CONSUMPTION FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS, AS THERE WILL BE LITTLE PROFIT FOR LABOR EXPENDED. THIS WILL FURTHER INCREASE GOVERNMENT DIFFICULTIES IN INCREASING RICE YIELDS FOR INTERNAL CONSUMPTION AND EXPORT AS GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WILL HAVE TO DEAL BOTH WITH NATURAL DISASTERS, I.E., THE CROP FAILURES IN CENTRAL VN, AND MOTIVATION DIFFICULTIES WITH SOUTH VIETNAMESE FARMERS. OFFICIAL RATIONNING ALSO INCLUDES MEAT, ONE POUND PER MONTH AND CLOTH, 5 METERS PER YEAR. SUGAR IS RATIONED, ONE POUND PER MONTH. WHEN MR. CASELLA MENTIONED THAT PEOPLE IN SAIGON WERE EATING MOSTLY INFERIOR RED RICE, (I.E., UNHUSKED) WE ASKED WHERE WAS THE BEST RICE GOING. MR. CASELLA RESPONDED BY SAYING THAT THE BEST WHITE RICE WAS BEING EXPORTED (DESTINATION UNKNOWN) IN ORDER TO OBTAIN FOREIGN EXCHANGE TO BUY WHEAT FLOUR (SUPPLIER UNKNOWN). THE REASON FOR EXPORTING THE BEST RICE WAS THAT THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE OBTAINED COULD BUY FOR THEM THREE TIMES THE AMOUNT OF WHEAT FLOUR AS RICE EXPORTED. IT MAY BE THAT FOR THIS REASON MR. CASELLA NOTED THAT HANOI OFFICIALS ARE SAYING, "WE (I.E., THE NORTH) ARE SUPPORTING THE SOUTH." MR. CASELLA ALSO MENTIONED NUMEROUS DIFFICULTIES IN EXCHANGING CURRENCY AND BANK DRAFTS DUE TO THE LACK OF FOREIGN CURRENCY AVAILABLE FOR ORDINARY USE.

3. ORGANIZATION. ACCORDING TO MR. CASELLA THE TREMENDOUS WAR TIME CAPABILITIES OF THE NORTH OR ORGANIZE ITSELF TO FIGHT, BUILD
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ROADS, ESTABLISH LINES OF COMMUNICATIONS AND LOGISTICS WERE CONFINED TO THE ARMY DURING WAR. MR. CASELLA OBSERVES, "THE BRAINS WERE IN THE ARMY" AND THE VIETNAMESE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO ESTABLISH A PEACE TIME BUREAUCRATIC STRUCTURE CAPABLE OF COPING WITH CURRENT PROBLEMS. THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS ENTAILS A SMALL ELITE MAKING POLICY DECISIONS WHICH ARE IGNORED, CHANGED, OR DILUTED AS THEY GO DOWN THE ADMINISTRATIVE CHAIN OF COMMAND. THE SUPERVISORY ASPECT OF CARRYING OUT ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS APPEARS TO BE PARTICULARLY INEPT. HOWEVER, MR. CASELLA DID EMPHASIZE THAT IF A PROBLEM IS WIDELY RECOGNIZED AS A PROBLEM, ORGANIZATIONAL AND BUREAUCRATIC PROCEDURES IMPROVE SIGNIFICANTLY. AN EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE SITUATION IN HAIPHONG HARBOR. MR. CASELLA SAID THAT HAIPHONG HARBOR IS CLOGGED WITH SHIPS AND THE DOCKS ARE PILED WITH CARGO BECAUSE THE VIETNAMESE DO NOT HAVE EFFICIENT CARGO HANDLING TECHNIQUES; HOWEVER, SHIPS CARRYING FOOD ARE UNLOADED WITH MINIMUM TIME AND MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY.

4. POLITICAL. MR. CASELLA BELIEVES THAT THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT IS QUITE NAIVE POLITICALLY CONCERNING THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS DO NOT REALIZE THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT NO LONGER HAS MUCH OF A STAKE

IN VIET-NAM AND THEREFORE HAS NO VESTED INTEREST IN VIET-NAM.
MR. CASELLA SAID THAT WHENEVER HE POINTS OUT TO VIETNAMESE
OFFICIALS THE OBVIOUS FACT THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS NO REAL,
VESTED, CURRENT INTEREST IN VIET-NAM, THE VIETNAMESE RESPOND WITH
"BLANK STARES", AS IF THIS HAD NEVER OCCURRED TO THEM. THE VIET-
NAMESE FURTHERMORE DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE HARDENING OF U.S.
CONGRESS ATTITUDES TO GIVING THEM AID.

5. RM. CASELLA SAID THE VIETNAMESE VIEW THE MIA ISSUE AS ONE
CONCOCTED TO DENY THEM THEIR RIGHTFUL DUE, I.E., GREAT AMOUNTS OF
AID. SIMULTANEOUSLY, THEY VIEW THE MIA ISSUE AS THE ONE THING THEY
HAVE THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WANTS. MR. CASELLA OBSERVES THAT
VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS ARE TALKING IN VERY MATERIALISTIC TERMS,
EXPECTING SUBSTANTIAL AID FOR BODIES RETURNED. HE ALSO BELIEVES
THAT THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT COULD GAIN A USEFUL PSYCHOLO-
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GICAL/PLITICAL VICTORY BY OVERTLY AND UNSTINTINGLY ASSISTING THE
U.S. GOVERNMENT TO RECOVER AMERICAN BODIES. HOWEVER, MR. CASELLA
DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT THE VIETNAMESE ATTITUDES, THAT WE REALLY
HAVE LITTLE OR NOTHING TO TALK ABOUT.

6. REFUGEES. MRM CASELLA NOTED A LARGE INFLUX OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES
INTO VIET-NAM THIS INFLUX OF REFUGEES FLEEING FROM A "BROTHER"
COUNTRY IS A SOURCE OF DEEP EMBARRASSMENT TO THE VIETNAMESE
GOVERNMENT. UNHCR, WITH THE INFORMAL PERMISSION OF VIETNAMESE
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, IS CURRENTLY ASSISTING SOME OF THESE REFUGEES
TO GO TO FRANCE. MR. CASELLA MENTIONED THAT INFORMAL ARRANGMENTS
SAVE THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT 'FACE'. HE BELEIVES THAT THE
VIETNAMESE WILL NOT ACKNOWLEDGE FORMALLY THE EXISTENCE
OF THE CAMBODIAN REFUGEES. ON ONE HAND THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT
IS SHOCKED BY THE ATROCITIES OCCURRING IN CAMBODIA AND WILL ASSIST
THE REFUGEES. ON THE OTHER HAND THEY ARE DETERMINED TO PRESERVE THE
FICTION THAT ALL INDO CHINA IS A 'PROMISED LAND' FULL OF 'MILK
AND HONEY.'

7. UNITD NATIONS. HANOI OFFICIALS, ACCORDING TO MR.
CASELLA, ARE ECSTATIC ABOUT THEIR ADMISSION TO THE UN. HOWEVER,
THIS STATE OF ECSTASY WAS RAPIDLY CURTAILED IN ONE HANOI OFFICAL
WHEN MR. CASELLA ASKED HIM HOW HE FELT ABOUT HAVING TO PAY UN
DUES.
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